



# Buzzwords ...

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At the March meeting of the national executive some difficult decisions once again had to be made. We realised at a meeting six months earlier that funding and timetables were issues critical for any proper disease control programme. At that time the decision was made to raise the hive levy for 1992 by 9 cents to fund a reduced programme. The Minister was also asked to approve a 41 cent increase for 1993 in the event we were unable to use the Commodities Levy Act.

The executive knows that the Hive Levy Act is not the ideal method of collecting money for the disease control programme. However, effective arrangements had to be in place in case the Commodities Levy Act proved unworkable. This is, in fact, what has happened. At the March meeting executive met with both Fruitgrowers Federation and MAF Policy representatives. It was obvious from our discussions that our decision not to proceed now with an application under the new act is appropriate under the circumstances.

The decisions relating to the hive levy were reaffirmed by the executive at the December meeting. The Minister was advised of our need for an early decision to allow us to prepare for the 1992-93 disease control programme. In simple terms, we are putting in place a disease control programme with MAF and beekeeper involvement.

MAF will be carrying out about 1000 apiary inspections with beekeepers carrying out nearly 1500, mostly during diseasathons. The programme will cost approximately \$125,000. The money will be raised entirely by increasing the hive levy.

This means that the hive levy for 1993 will be set at \$1.11. Though this course of action should not be a complete surprise to the industry, the executive knows that it will face criticism for its decisions. However, reviewing the outcomes of this year's reduced services in disease control, executive felt obliged to put in place a more effective programme.

Executive has also been discussing requests for compensation from those beekeepers affected by the emergency response in Nelson in November.

European foulbrood is a Second Schedule disease under the Apiaries Act. Currently compensation as of right is restricted to First Schedule diseases, and then for actual losses only. No compensation is payable for lost opportunity or potential. For the executive to lobby government for compensation in the Nelson case involves a double hurdle - EFB is not a First Schedule disease and the compensation sought is primarily related to loss of opportunity suffered by beekeepers there.

Last month's *Buzzwords* carried an article indicating that MAF Policy might welcome the opportunity to avoid responding to such outbreaks in the future. Some executive members felt that lobbying for compensation for the beekeepers involved would provide further reason for such a change in government policy.

Executive discussed the issues thoroughly and agreed upon the following courses of action:

First, specifics will be obtained from the beekeepers involved in support of an *ex gratia* payment from the Minister. The request would not be for compensation as such, but rather for a payment to ensure that beekeepers in the future who 'do the right thing' by reporting such potential threats do not feel disinclined to do so for fear of the economic consequences.

Second, executive is investigating possible insurance for such cases in the future. Options include policies for individual beekeepers or an industry-wide scheme funded from several potential sources. The issues of loss of potential and opportunity are being included in the proposals to give the industry the widest choice when providing for future security.

Third, the executive discussed forms of compensation from within our industry. In that regard a supportive direction has come from a meeting of the Canterbury branch. The meeting agreed to a \$500 payment to Gerard Stephens in appreciation of his integrity in reporting the incident. The donation is also to act as an encouragement to others who report unusual findings in their hives. They should know that the industry will provide tangible acknowledgement of such responsible behaviour. The executive commends the Canterbury branch for its actions and recommends the concept to all branches and beekeepers.

Dudley Ward, president

## DEATH BY STARVATION

Here's one of the more interesting articles we've read on EFB. It's written by Deborah Thomas, an Apiary Officer with the NSW MAF. After reading it I realised why halfmoon disorder so closely resembles EFB -- in both cases the larvae starve to death!

*Melissococcus pluton* is the causative agent of the bacterial disease European foulbrood. The bacteria are ingested by developing larvae in food supplied by nurse bees with

contaminated mouthparts. The bacteria do not produce a toxin, invade tissues, or create any mechanical damage. They simply compete with the larvae for their food -- they are parasites!

If the bacterial burden begins early in the larval stage and results in a large occupancy in the larval gut, the larvae will starve unless they are receiving surplus food. Where such larvae die, they do not contribute to the perpetuation of the disease because the bacteria are sealed in the corpse, which is removed from the hive "in toto" by nurse bees. (Remember, unlike *Bacillus larvae*, *M. pluton* doesn't produce spores - Ed.) It is the larvae which live, rising above a light bacterial burden, which carry on the infestation.

This light burden is caused by either too few bacteria being ingested or by their ingestion occurring too late in the larval stage. This precludes the multiplication of sufficient bacteria to fill the gut. These lightly affected larvae survive to pupate, and it is when the internal closure of the larval gut opens on pupation that the cell wall and capping are plastered with faecal pellets containing EFB bacteria. The cocoons these weakened larvae spin are inadequate to cover the contaminated pellets and leave some, if not all, in an accessible state for the nurse bees to clean out in preparation for the next generation. The nurse bees use their mouthparts as cleaning tools. When these become contaminated, they allow the bacteria to be passed on to other bees and finally larvae, thus completing the EFB life cycle.

EFB rarely kills colonies, but it does demoralise and weaken them. It can also have severe limiting effects on their production.

Although antibiotics are acknowledged as a control method for EFB it is imperative that they be administered in a time frame which will ensure their efficacy. This means early spring (where the effort is applied to break an annual cycle), or immediately (where the exposure is new) at any time it occurs, because the degree of infestation is always lowest at the onset of a disease. Badly timed applications exacerbate the problem, making it far worse than no application at all. This is because the antibiotics will save the lives of heavily diseased larvae, allowing them to survive and pupate. Such pupae will deposit heavily contaminated faecal pellets on their cell surfaces, passing on large amounts of bacteria for the contamination of future generations' larval food.

*The Australasian Beekeeper, December 1990*

## POSSUM BAIT

A new, slow-acting possum bait that can be used without a poisons licence has been released by ICI Crop Care. Talon is being marketed for control of Tb-infected possums in bush margins near farmland, or in town belts and urban wastelands. It's ideal for the general public who don't want to handle acute, fast-acting poisons. It's also friendly to bees. The product uses an anticoagulant poison, like that found in rat poison, which inhibits the blood's ability to clot. Death takes 2-3 weeks, so there's plenty of time to administer antidotes in case of accidental poisoning. And the best part is that the product is both not attractive to bees and



incapable of killing them. There's only one hitch – the cost. A 10 kg bag of Talon costs around \$40 and is good for about 160 possums. That's 25 cents a pop!

*The Main Report, November 1991*

## BEE HAVERS, BEE KEEPERS AND BEE FARMERS

Ted Roberts, Apicultural Consultant, Palmerston North, and NBA Executive Officer, gave a great talk last year at a Hawkes Bay branch field day. According to Ted, our industry is divided into three distinct groups:

**1. BEE HAVERS** - these people "have" bees. That is they own a hive or two, which they acquired probably on impulse, and as likely as not they then lost interest after their first big sting-up. They may attempt a compulsory brood check once a year, super up (if they remember), and largely leave the bees to fend for themselves for the rest of the year. It's only because bees are not really domesticated animals that people can be "bee havers". Any other pet or domestic animal treated in the same way would either die of neglect wander off and find a new home.

**2. BEE KEEPERS** - people in this group have a genuine interest in bees and would probably keep a hive even if they didn't get any honey and had to feed it. They are active in beekeeper organisations, attend meetings, read and learn about their bees, and invent new ways of doing old things. Their equipment is of a high standard, is well-maintained, and their bees are usually well-bred and well-mannered. People in this group can't understand the mentality of those in the first group and often don't understand many of the actions of those in the third group.

**3. BEE FARMERS** - this group relies on bees for at least part of their income. While they have a genuine interest in bees, their main concerns are with maintaining a financial asset and generating income. Many of their practices cause raised eyebrows among the second group (eg. killing and replacing a "perfectly good" second year queen using boxes which have holes in them and aren't attractively painted). If they neglect their bees then their income suffers, but if they were to spend as much time on each hive as the second group, they would also go broke. The "bee farmer" often regards "bee keepers" as rather quaint and eccentric sorts!

There is general agreement between "bee keepers" and "bee farmers" that "bee havers" are a nuisance to the industry. Their bees are often dark and short tempered, swarm frequently, cause neighbour problems and give all beekeepers a bad name. Sometimes they are also a disease hazard, but they are often an easy target in that regard. And "bee havers" rightly claim that in our free society they have the right to keep their bees the way they like as long as it is within the law.

"Bee keepers" can also run foul of their neighbours and many cannot see why those who live around them are not as enthusiastic about bees as they are. In some cases it can lead to real problems, with the local authority getting involved in "nuisance" claims.

Perhaps what is needed is for "bee keepers" and "bee farmers" to encourage "bee havers" to either become beekeepers or quit the industry. "Bee keepers" and "bee farmers" must also accept that many people in the community have a genuine fear of bees and a dislike of spotty washing and cars. Beekeepers need to think carefully about the siting of apiaries and their size, particularly in urban areas.

A happy community, according to Ted, is one where everyone is considerate and conscious, not only of their own rights, but also of their duty to their neighbours and fellow beekeepers. We couldn't agree more.

*"Buzz Sheet", Hawkes Bay Branch, April 1991*

## MORE ON ORGANICS

I recently had a meeting with a European honey buyer who is very much in touch with the organic honey market. He was visiting New Zealand on the quiet to see for himself whether 1) we had large enough areas of non-agricultural land to produce organic honey, and 2) we had the ability to provide truly independent certification of organic products. He told me he purposely didn't visit any beekeepers on this trip because his company wasn't interested in establishing commercial contacts until it was sure the effort would be worthwhile.

This buyer has strong contacts in the EC bureaucracy and was able to give me some background on the discussions taking place in Europe regarding organic honey certification. One problem seems to be the issue of apiary siting and production source. There is some debate about whether honey can in fact be organic, even if the hives are sited on organic farms. He believes the important factor is the honey source; if the honey is produced from non-agricultural plants, then it is by definition organic. Others argue that the hives must be sited at least 3km away from conventional agriculture, which effectively rules out most European agricultural land.

The siting problem far outweighs other factors such as processing, sugar feeding, and even drug feeding. However, of even greater importance, he believes, are the entrenched interests of the existing European honey packers. They have fears about allowing inspectors to view their records and production methods. They also wonder whether allowing organic honey onto the shelves will downgrade their existing products. Extensive lobbying is under way, and at this point it is still far from certain whether honey will in fact be part of the final EC organics regulation. We'll know for sure, though, by July of this year. That's when the final mandatory standard will be out. If honey is included, the same standard will apply throughout the EC. The standard is also likely to be very basic and far less stringent than existing standards such as BioGro and Demeter. He suggests beekeepers here don't pre-guess the EC regulation and adopt standards which are tougher than they need to be.

He also told me an almost unbelievable story which shows what sort of games they play in the European commercial





## HONEY INDUSTRY TRUST FUND

Applications for funding close on 15 August and 15 February. Forms available from the NBA, PO Box 4048, Wellington.

world. He swears he was told three years ago by two different European honey packers that he wouldn't be able to buy honey from private sources in New Zealand because we had a marketing authority here that controlled all exports. For those of you with short memories, the HMA actually ceased operations in 1982!

*Cliff Van Eaton*

- New Zealand trade officials in New York report that growth in the U.S. organic foods market has been "astronomical". The number of organically cultivated acres there is increasing by 15% per year, while consumption of organic foodstuffs is expanding by an annual rate of 30-40%. The organic market is currently estimated at US\$204 million, and is part of the far greater US\$4 billion market in natural foods.

The primary target market for organic products is the San Francisco Bay area, followed by Los Angeles and New York City. Organic products there typically attract a 25-30% price premium. Such products do not, however, normally find their way into conventional supermarkets, because retailers have a difficult time selling the higher-priced organics alongside lower-priced non-organics. Irregular supplies of organic foodstuffs, particularly fresh and chilled items, are also a disincentive to mass market food retailers there.

The U.S. is also introducing federal organics legislation similar to that about to be enacted by the EC. The Organic Foods Production Act, which goes into effect in October 1993, sets out minimum production standards for all food products sold as organic. An organic standards board has been appointed to devise a list of approved and prohibited substances. Twenty-six states currently have organic legislation on their books, but all fifty must meet the national law's standards by 1993.

*Export News, February 27 1992*

- The NBA executive has contracted MAF Quality Management to develop a certification scheme for organic honey. The idea is to come up with a scheme now which uses a standard similar to the ones being discussed in the US and the EC. We will then already have a system in place once the overseas standards come into affect. A first draft of the system will be submitted to executive for their April meeting.

## FROM THE BRANCHES

The **Hawkes Bay** branch will be having their AGM on Monday, April 13, at 7.30pm at the Brown Owl Coffee Lounge, Hastings (note change of venue from previous meetings). Members are urged to bring their partners for a "scintillating social and super supper" following the meeting. Cost will be \$5 per person.

The **Southern North Island** had a most successful 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday celebration. The field day was attended by over 100 people, all keen to learn and swap ideas. The dinner was also a splendid occasion. It began on a high note with New Zealand's surprise cricket victory over the Aussies, and progressed to the conferring of branch life membership on Mervyn Farrington, a fitting tribute (and big surprise) for someone who has done so much for local beekeepers and the branch. The evening ended with a story-telling session - lots of secrets disclosed, with each person trying to outdo the previous. Truly a night to remember! Now that they've fully recovered, the branch has scheduled their AGM for Thursday, May 7, at 10 am at the Rotary Club Rooms, 30 Linton Street, Palmerston North.

The **Auckland** branch will be holding their April meeting at the N.Z. Society of Accountants rooms, 27-33 Hinerua Street, Remuera, Auckland, on Tuesday, April 28. The AGM begins at 7 pm, with a general meeting at 7:30. Both the Northland branch and the National Executive will be in attendance, so all members are urged to attend.

The **Waikato** branch has supplied us with a list of their upcoming meetings. These include: AGM, April 24; Ren... Formulation, June 5; Remit Voting, July 10; and Post-Conference Meeting, August 7. All meetings will be held at the Green Room, Homestead, Ruakura Agricultural Centre, Hamilton, beginning at 10 am. How's that for organisation!

## PADDY'S CLOVER

Luck may soon be easier to find. The DSIR's first venture into pot plants has seen the release of two varieties of four-leaf clover, in conjunction with a nation-wide chain of garden centres. As you can imagine, the plants have proven to be top sellers.

DSIR say it has taken years to develop clover plants with multi-leaves. Both varieties also have larger flower heads and stronger fragrances than white clover, which could be good news for honey producers. All we have to do now is get them out of the pots and into the paddock.

*Rural News, March 4 1992*

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